

Sexual Behaviors in Children

Should you have questions or concerns about your child's sexual behaviors, call the Stop It Now! Toll-free helpline at 1-888-773-8368

Preschool (ages 0-5 years)

Common:

- Sexual language relating to differences in body parts, bathroom talk, pregnancy, and birth
- Self-fondling at home and in public
- Showing and looking at private body parts

Uncommon:

- Discussion of sexual activity
- Sexual contact experience with other children
- Masturbation not responsive to redirection or limits
- Inserting objects in genital openings

School Age (6 to 12 years)

Common:

- Questions about menstruation, pregnancy sexual behavior
- "Experimenting" with same-age children, including kidding, fondling, exhibitionism, and role-playing
- Masturbation at home or other private places

Uncommon:

- Discussion of explicit sexual acts
- Asking adults or peers to participate in explicit sexual acts

Adolescence (13 to 16 years)

Common:

- Questions about decision-making, social relationships, and sexual customs
- Masturbation in private
- Experimenting between adolescents of the same age, including open-mouth kissing, fondling, and body rubbing

Uncommon:

- Sexual interest in much younger children
- Aggression in touching others' genitals
- Asking adults to participate in explicit sexual acts

Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_abused/index.cfm]

(DeCarli, J. 2012)

